

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 901

By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of attorney Avon N. Williams III of Nashville.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the untimely passing of Avon N. Williams III; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Williams was an exemplary public servant and consummate professional who worked assiduously to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens in numerous capacities; and

WHEREAS, born in 1959, Avon Williams was raised in Nashville, and as the namesake of his father, noted civil rights activist and prominent attorney, the late Avon N. Williams, Jr., young Avon's commitment to public service was shaped in an environment of principled belief, ardent intellectual curiosity, and courage in the face of adversity; and

WHEREAS, in this vibrant atmosphere, Avon Williams's mother, Joan Bontemps Williams, imparted to her son a rare gift for intimacy and humility; Avon would become a man who learned to shift easily from elevated responsibility to casual camaraderie, and he will be long remembered for his big and generous heart; and

WHEREAS, the exemplary academic career of Avon Williams III includes graduation from University School in Nashville, a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Williams College in Massachusetts, a Doctorate of Jurisprudence from the University of Texas School of Law earned in 1984, and a Masters of Business Administration from Vanderbilt University earned in 2001; Mr. Williams also completed coursework at the Institute of International and Comparative Law (Sorbonne) in Paris, France, as well as completing additional coursework at Harvard University and at Fisk University; Mr. Williams was also a Fellow of the National Securities Studies program conducted jointly by the John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University; and

WHEREAS, in a career marked by distinctive public service, Avon N. Williams III worked for the Nashville Law Firm of Williams & Dinkins before accepting a position as a Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State, serving from 1985 to 1989; Mr. Williams's diplomatic assignments included meritorious service as Second Secretary and Vice Consul in Manila, Philippines, during the 1986 "People Power" revolution, Advisor for Political and Security Affairs at the U. S. Mission to the United Nations, Political and Economic Affairs Officer at the U.S. Consulate in Martinique, French West Indies, and as Desk Officer for Eastern Caribbean Affairs; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Williams's career experience broadened even further over the next seven years as he held the positions of Assistant Commissioner with the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, commercial banking officer at J.C. Bradford & Co. and NationsBank, and he also served as General Counsel for the Tennessee Department of Safety during Governor Sundquist's administration in 1996; and

WHEREAS, Avon Williams also utilized his intellectual and verbal gifts as a political analyst for print, radio, and television; he provided stimulating insight and social commentary at Nashville's NBC and PBS affiliates, radio station WKDA, and as a contributing columnist for the Nashville Banner newspaper; and

WHEREAS, a man of ideas and principles who recognized the importance of taking an active role in public affairs, Avon Williams helped to establish a Tennessee-based public policy group, the Andrew Jackson Institute, in 1993; and

WHEREAS, at the time of his passing, Avon N. Williams III was serving as the Acting General Counsel of the Army and had also served as Principal Deputy General Counsel of the Department of the Army since his appointment by President Bush on September 17, 2001; and

WHEREAS, in addition to his distinctive professional career, Mr. Williams held various offices and served on the executive committees of numerous civic and charitable organizations, including the United Way of Metropolitan Nashville, the Nashville Chapter of the American Red Cross, Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity, the University School of Nashville, the Tennessee Foreign Language Institute, and the Tennessee Charter School Resource Foundation; he had also been a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the National Association of Bond

Lawyers, Leadership Nashville, the Tennessee Republican Party State Executive Committee, and the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies; and

WHEREAS, a man of great religious conviction, Mr. Williams was an active and devout Christian, attending church weekly with his family; he also organized a weekly Bible study group in his office for men with whom he worked at the Pentagon; and

WHEREAS, Avon Williams was also deeply devoted to his family, traveling each week from his work in Northern Virginia to his home in Brentwood to spend as many treasured hours with his family as possible; he was ever committed to doing "anything it takes" to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Avon Williams enjoyed the loving companionship of his wife, Janita Wolfe Williams, and was the proud father of seven adoring children and step-children of ages ranging from two to eighteen years old, Caroline, Cole, Amory, and Jonah Williams and Corey, Will and Christopher Thomas; and

WHEREAS, he is also survived by his devoted sister, Wendy J. Williams, as well as many other cherished relatives and friends; and

WHEREAS, Avon Williams was preceded in death by his parents, Avon N. Williams, Jr., and Joan Bontemps Williams; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Army held Avon N. Williams III in such high esteem that it honored him with an exceptional and moving memorial service in the Pentagon, a singular honor bestowed upon only the most exceptional of persons; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Williams was awarded the Department of Defense Exceptional Public Service Award, the highest military award given to civilian military personnel; this award states: "For outstanding service and exemplary achievement as the Acting General Counsel and Principal Deputy General Counsel for the Department of the Army. Mr. Williams exhibited exceptional leadership and vision in pursuing comprehensive changes in the delivery of legal services, establishing a steady course for the future by re-energizing cooperative relationships between the Office of the General Counsel and the larger Army community. His wisdom, character, and leadership were instrumental in shaping Army capabilities to accomplish its mission while caring for soldiers, civilians, and family members. Mr. Williams's numerous achievements, devotion to duty, and selfless service are in keeping with the highest standards

of honorable civilian service and reflect great credit upon him, the Secretariat, and the United States Army."; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Williams's family was also presented on his behalf a United States flag, as well as the flag of the Senior Executive Service, along with a letter from President George W. Bush recognizing Mr. Williams's vision, high achievements, and contributions; and

WHEREAS, Avon N. Williams III leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Avon N. Williams III, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and great ability as an attorney and public servant, his devotion to his faith, his country, and his family, and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Avon N. Williams III.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.